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SIPDIS

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KOCI, SA

SUBJECT: PRINCE KHALID DECREES CLOSE OF ALL SUMMER CAMPS IN  
MECCA REGION AS PART OF A CAMPAIGN AGAINST EXTREMISM

Classified By: Acting Consul General G Stoner for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. A blog recently revealed that Mecca region governor Prince Khalid Al-Faisal is closing religious summer camps for Saudi youth in the Mecca region. The particular type of camps being shut and the extent to which this has actually impacted operations is the subject of local debate. Several local Jeddawi sources commented to PolOff about the new policy and the rumors surrounding it. Indications are that this is an attempt by the Prince to derail summer camps breeding extremism and that a licensing process has been put in place to insure that some camps continue to operate. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) A blogger on the conservative blog Al-Saha noted surprise and questioned Prince Khalid's decision to cancel all religious summer camps in Jeddah and Mecca. The blogger questioned why the camps have been shut down in this region, while they remain operating throughout the rest of the Kingdom. Additionally, the member of Al-Saha claims that the camps are recreational and only promote good.

¶3. (C) After a meeting with PolOff, Nawaf Jamjoom, a Jeddawi businessman with school-aged children, agreed to check with his sources and then informed that "it is true that summer camps have been cancelled" and further that, "these are pure summer camps that setup tents or portable cabins on empty lots." While not specifically mentioning any religious or extremist aspect of the camps, Jamjoom hints at the cause of Prince Khalid's decision noting that, "it is believed that the main reason behind canceling them is because the lectures are not monitored or approved by any entity."

¶4. (C) A local Shi'a Imam and religious leader, Mohamad Atia, met with PolOff and offered his understanding of the closure issue. He said that he heard about the ruling and it reflects that "Prince Khalid is against religious things". He went on to explain that the camps are usually religious and focused on reciting Koran, some being good and others bad. He admitted that "bad" camps often preach intolerance towards other groups. He explained that, for example, some of these camps might teach that, "America is your enemy". Atia heard that there is a licensing process for camps and that the rule is not being applied uniformly.

¶5. (C) PolOff met with Sami Nawar, a Jeddawi employee of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, and asked about the reported closure of summer camps. Nawar paused, then laughed, and commented that the Prince is very strict. He went on to note that he had recently been in a meeting with Prince Khalid. The Prince said they were shutting down all the camps in order to prevent the growth of "fanatics". Nawar said that there is now a registration process for camps and that they

must submit applications on time in order to open. Nawar was not specific as to how the process works, but did say that there are criteria in place.

¶16. (C) A local public high school teacher, Aiman Alharby met with PolOff and noted that summer camps have all closed, including both religious and non-religious camps. He went on to say that he is aware of a licensing process in place allowing limited camps to continue operating.

¶17. (C) COMMENT. The various accounts indicate that Prince Khalid has attempted to close down extremist religious summer camps in the Mecca province, particularly those that preach hate to children. The measure, which is interpreted by some locally as being heavy-handed, has not actually caused the closure of all summer camps, but instead led to a process to insure that those remaining opening meet certain criteria. The set of criteria is likely designed to insure that the camps are recreational in nature and if religiously based, not extreme. It is not yet clear the extent to which the policy is being enforced or what are the exact criteria and structure of the licensing process. END COMMENT.  
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